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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000151

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TAGS: ELAB PGOV PREL ASEC GV  
SUBJECT: UNION LEADER HAS NO HOPE FOR PEACEFUL SOLUTION

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. During a meeting with Poloff on April 29, union leader Rabiatou presented a gloomy outlook on Guinea's current political situation. She said that it is impossible to find a solution as long as President Conte remains in power, and literally scoffed at the idea that transparent legislative elections could set the stage for a successful transition. Rabiatou called for a military coup, but said that the army is not strong enough to organize one. She said the dialogue process is essentially blocked and the unions are now focusing on more pressing economic issues rather than political ones. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On April 29, Poloff met with Rabiatou Serah Diallo, Secretary General of the National Confederation of Guinean

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Workers (CNTG) and co-chair of the Unions-Intersyndicale. Rabiatou was coming from a radio interview at the Radio Television Guinean station and heading to another meeting with union colleagues.

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EVEN BILL CLINTON COULDN'T FIX IT  
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¶3. (S) Throughout the course of the meeting, Rabiatou was pessimistic, repeatedly saying that she sees "no end" to Guinea's current political crisis. She said the Guinean system is fundamentally broken and that change is impossible as long as President Lansana Conte remains in power. Rabiatou told Poloff that Prime Minister Kouyate has failed miserably, but he is only part of the bigger problem. "You could bring in (former U.S. president) Bill Clinton as Guinea's prime minister and even he would not be able to get anything done," Rabiatou said.

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FOCUSING ON THE ECONOMY  
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¶4. (SBU) According to Rabiatou, the Committee de Suivi, which was set up in early January in order to evaluate implementation of the 2007 Accords, is completely blocked. She said that the Committee had already sent a letter to the PM requesting a direct consultation, and that they are hoping to meet with him on April 30. When asked what the unions and other negotiators hope to get out of the April 30 meeting, Rabiatou said that the PM must commit to implementing appropriate economic relief measures to counter the steadily increasing cost of living. Several times, Poloff asked her to specify the relief measures the unions are hoping for, but Rabiatou evaded answering the question.

15. (SBU) Rabiatou did confirm however, that the unions were behind the government's recent decision to institute an export ban on agricultural products. When Poloff said that such a policy is only going to exacerbate the situation in the long-term and that the international community does not support the policy, Rabiatou stubbornly insisted that exports must be banned at least through December 2008. She argued that neighboring countries are essentially stealing Guinea's food stocks by coming over the border to buy them and then transporting them back to their home countries to sell at higher prices. "The Senegalese are preserving their own forests, but coming over here to buy the charcoal that is made through the destruction of Guinean forests; it's not right," she said.

16. (SBU) Poloff pointed out that with the unions focusing on economic relief measures, the underlying political issues will essentially be ignored. Rabiatou agreed, but said that "we have to make sure our stomachs are full; until then, we cannot pay attention to the political issues." According to Rabiatou, until the economic pressures are dealt with, no one has the energy to focus on the political crisis. She said she realized that the unions are not addressing the root problems, but that in order to avoid violence and maintain the peace, they have been forced to shift their attention to the economic issues.

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GUINEANS HAVE PROSTITUTED THEMSELVES  
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17. (S) Referring to popular demonstrations against rising food prices around the world, Poloff asked why Guineans have been relatively quiet on the subject. Rabiatou said that "Guineans have prostituted themselves." When asked to clarify, she said that citizens have lost all dignity and

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morality. She said everyone is essentially "on the take" and simply looking for the next opportunity to take someone's money in return for political support. "All you have to do is go into the local neighborhoods and look around; everyone is taking money," she said.

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THE MILITARY WITHIN THE MILITARY  
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18. (S) According to Rabiatou, Guinea's problem is that it does not have a strong military. Echoing statements she had made in previous meetings with Poloff, Rabiatou said that the only solution to Guinea's current crisis is a military-organized transition. "We need the military to force the action, get rid of the top, and restart at ground zero." Poloff told Rabiatou that such a situation could spiral out of control, and that there would be no guarantee that a new government would be better than the old one. Poloff stressed that there a number of people already positioning themselves to take over if an opportunity should arise, and that the only mechanism for ensuring a peaceful, democratic transition is to have transparent elections that result in the election of a representative government. Rabiatou snorted and said she had "absolutely no confidence in the elections."

19. (S) When asked whether there are factions in the military making a move for a coup d'etat, she said "that is exactly the problem; we do not have a strong military." When pressed, she said that she does not have close contacts in the military and is not aware of any group organizing a takeover, although her body language suggested she knew more than she was saying. At one point, she said "there is one army within the other, and the smaller army is not controlled by the Chef D'Etat Major." Rabiatou later said that there is no evident leader within the military and that many officers

lack courage, but that many soldiers are frustrated with the current situation.

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READY TO BE THE VICTIMS  
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¶10. (SBU) Rabiatou made several references to perceived threats against herself and union members. She mentioned that her personal plantation, which is located in Boffa, was burned to the ground on April 25. She said that her plantation was similarly burned in 2007 during the nationwide labor strike. When asked who might have done it, she shrugged her shoulders and said she didn't know. Later in the discussion, she said that union members are "ready to be the first victims; we must defend change."

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UNION LEADERS IN AGREEMENT  
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¶11. (SBU) Poloff also asked whether Rabiatou and fellow union leader Dr. Ibrahima Fofana agree on the unions' current position and activities. She said "as of this morning, we did." She then said that it's a day to day thing as to whether they see eye to eye, but for the time being, they are in agreement.

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COMMENT  
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¶12. (S) As in recent visits, Rabiatou appeared tired. She was particularly pessimistic this time around and seemed to see no visible solution to Guinea's political problems, at least while the president is still in power. She seemed to want to play up the martyr angle, although she did not provide specific details about possible targeting of union members, other than the fire at the plantation, and she did not have much information about that incident either. Several times during the conversation, she said that the international community needed to intervene to fix the situation. Poloff repeatedly said that elections offer the best solution and that democracy is not something that can be imposed by an external force. Rabiatou disagreed and said that we (the international community) have done it many times before. The discussion was decidedly cynical, with a clear sense of fatalism, and lack of hope for a workable solution - and this from one of the key leaders for change. END COMMENT.  
CARTER